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PP RUEHFK RUEHKSO RUEHNAG RUEHNH
DE RUEHKO #0950/01 1140051
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 240051Z APR 09
FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2541
INFO RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/THE WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAWJA/USDOJ WASHDC PRIORITY
RULSDMK/USDOT WASHDC PRIORITY
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 09 TOKYO 000950

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OIIP](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [ELAB](#) [JA](#)

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1) Anti-piracy bill passes Lower House

MAINICHI (Page 1) (Excerpt)
April 24, 2009

Yasushi Sengoku

The anti-piracy bill that will expand the duties of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) dispatched to waters off Somalia in Eastern Africa to include guarding foreign-owned vessels passed the House of Representatives on April 23 by a majority of approval votes from the ruling parties. It was then sent to the House of Councillors. All four opposition parties - Democratic Party of Japan, Japanese

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Communist Party, Social Democratic Party, and Peoples New Party - voted against the measure. The opposition camp does not plan to drag out deliberation on the bill in the Upper House. Even if the bill is voted down in the upper chamber, it will be passed by the Lower House by an overriding two-thirds vote. The outlook is that the bill will be enacted during the current Diet session.

2) Opposition bloc out of step

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Abridged)
April 24, 2009

Ryo Matsuo, Yasushi Sengoku

A government-introduced antipiracy bill, bearing the Self-Defense Forces' antipiracy mission off Somalia in mind, passed through the House of Representatives yesterday. The legislation is now easily expected to clear the Diet during its current session. The government feels relieved and deflated. "I never expected it as soon as this," one official said. The Diet has been divided with the ruling coalition holding a majority of the seats in its lower chamber and the opposition parties dominating its upper chamber. The government and the ruling parties do not want to raise the hurdle of the SDF's overseas activities, while the leading opposition Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto) wants to avoid being involved too much in security issues that could disturb the opposition parties' joint struggles and the DPJ's unity. The breakdown of talks over DPJ-proposed revisions to the bill can be said to have unexpectedly resulted from the concurrence of their respective expectations. The ruling and opposition parties avoided frontal debate in the House of Representatives, failing to discuss the point at issue.

The government bill is simple, based on maritime security operations under the Self-Defense Forces Law's Article 82. The bill adds such measures as allowing the SDF to defend foreign ships that have nothing to do with Japan and fire on pirate ships that refuse orders to stop (i.e., easing the government's weapons use standards for the SDF). Meanwhile, it prescribes nothing about the Diet's role or commitment to such maritime security operations, only mandating the government to submit a report to the Diet.

3) International conference pledges 20.8 billion yen in assistance to Somalia, with Japan considering 2 billion yen package

TOKYO (Page 6) (Abridged)
April 24, 2009

By Hiroshi Hoshi in Brussels

An international conference aimed at stabilizing Somalia, which continues to be wracked by internal conflict and incidents of piracy, was held on April 23 in Brussels. The participants agreed to provide assistance totaling \$213 million (or approximately 20.8 billion yen) for such projects as beefing up public security organizations. Japan is considering donating over 2 billion yen for such efforts as the peacekeeping activities of the African Union (AU) in Somalia.

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon stressed: "Piracy has its roots in Somalia's lawlessness. If we strengthen public safety on land, the seas will be safe." He urged some 60 countries and

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regions to provide financial assistance for such efforts as beefing up the public security organizations of the provisional government in Somalia, economic reconstruction, and peacekeeping operations by the AU. Somali President Sharif Sheikh Ahmed said, "Reconstruction is indeed the only way to resolve the piracy issue," and he asked for cooperation to create a coastal patrol squad. He praised the conference, saying, "This has been an historical opportunity to share out problem with the international community."

Japan over the last two years has provided a total of \$67 million for reconstruction assistance. State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Seiko Hashimoto did not specify at the conference how much Japan would provide, but she revealed to the press that Japan was considering an additional donation of approximately 2 billion yen.
4) Aso mulls constitutional reform for collective self-defense

SANKEI (Top play) (Abridged)
April 24, 2009

Prime Minister Taro Aso yesterday met at his office with former Ambassador to the United States Shunji Yanai, who presided over a security affairs advisory panel for then Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, to hear his views concerning the government's conventional interpretation of the Constitution. The government has been taking the position that it is unconstitutional for Japan to exercise the right of collective self-defense. In the wake of North Korea's launch of a ballistic missile and the Maritime Self-Defense Force's start of antipiracy activities, Aso is believed to have judged that there are impending situations where there is need to reinterpret the Constitution so that Japan can participate in collective self-defense. If the prime minister moves in the direction of reinterpretation, Japan will take a big step forward in strengthening its alliance with the United States and making international contributions.

The meeting was held with Assistant Chief Cabinet Secretary Kyoji Yanagisawa (for security affairs) also attending. Yanai spelled out the advisory panel's discussions and explained that constitutional reinterpretation is a pressing issue, according to Yanagisawa.

"What the advisory panel discussed has been left as is," Aso told reporters after the meeting, "so I just listened to him." Aso added, "The report's wording is long, so I think I'll have to study it." With this, Aso indicated that he was positive about changing the government's constitutional interpretation. In June 2008, the advisory panel presented a report to then Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda.

The advisory panel's policy proposals focused on the advisability of participating in collective self-defense in four cases: 1) defending U.S. naval vessels on the high seas; 2) intercepting ballistic missiles targeted at the United States; 3) use of weapons in international peace activities; and 4) backing up foreign troops in United Nations peacekeeping operations. The report concluded that it would be possible for Japan to do so if the government alters its constitutional interpretation to allow collective self-defense.

However, Prime Minister Fukuda at the time ruled out the possibility of changing the government's constitutional interpretation. He told reporters: "I've never said that I would change (the government's interpretation. The report is over, so it's concluded." The advisory panel's report was then sealed.

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5) Ruling coalition submits a constitution examination council motion; DPJ reacts to it as forcible

ASAHI (Page 4) (Abridged)
April 24, 2009

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the New Komeito yesterday presented to the House of Representatives Rules and Administration Committee a motion to propose a provision specifying the size of and requirements for decisions by the Lower House Constitution examination council that will discuss constitutional revision plans. The council's size has yet to be determined and it has not yet deliberated on any matter. The ruling coalition intends to set the council in motion before the current Diet session closes, with the national referendum law scheduled to take effect in May next year.

The ruling bloc plans to have the council adopt the motion before the May 3 Constitution Memorial Day with the aim of presenting a provision during a Lower House plenary session. Nevertheless, in view of a negative reaction from the major opposition Democratic Party of Japan, whether the provision will be approved in the current Diet session remains unclear.

The ruling bloc's plan is designed to set the total number of council members at 50, the same as the budget committee, and to assign seats in proportion to the size of political parties. Under its plan, a decision can be made by a majority of those present and the council can meet even while the Diet is out of session.

DPJ principal director Koichiro Genba reacted strongly to the plan, saying: "We have never said that we are opposed to the provision, but it is regrettable that the matter is being handled in a forcible manner. Do the LDP and the New Komeito want to use the Constitution as a tool of political bargaining?" There are no prospects to present the provision to the opposition-controlled House of Councillors.

6) Foreign Minister Nakasone to visit Iran

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)
April 24, 2009

Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone has decided to visit Iran during the Golden Week holidays in early May. He is expected to hold talks with his Iranian counterpart Manuchehr Mottaki in Teheran. In order to stabilize Afghanistan, a neighboring country of Iran, the two foreign ministers will confirm bilateral cooperation, including preventing the distribution of narcotics by strengthening security around the border, as well as helping Afghan refugees support their return to the country. Nakasone is also expected to take up Iran's enriched-uranium nuclear program as an agenda item for discussion.

7) Nakasone to announce an increase in Japan's financial contribution to IAEA for nuclear disarmament

ASAHI (Page 4) (Abridged)
April 24, 2009

Atsuko Niuchi

Following President Barack Obama's announcement in his Prague speech

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that the U.S. would aim at achieving a nuclear-weapons free world, Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone will announce in a speech in

Tokyo on April 27 Japan's comprehensive policy toward nuclear disarmament. He will specifically announce that Japan will increase its financial contribution to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in order to reinforce the nuclear nonproliferation system. He also will call upon nuclear powers other than the United States and Russia, such as China, to join the nuclear disarmament initiative.

Tokyo has already announced its "strong support" for the Obama speech. To give a boost to the Obama administration's nuclear disarmament effort, Nakasone is expected to point out some 10 items, such as: (1) the need for nuclear powers to reduce their nuclear arms in a transparent manner, (2) bringing the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) into effect, and (3) an early start of talks on the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty. Japan puts especially high priority on the role of the IAEA, which supports the nuclear nonproliferation (NPT) system through inspections. Nakasone will announce an increase in Japan's financial contribution to that body, which has been suffering from a budgetary shortage due to an increase in inspections.

The IAEA's main budget consists of a regular budget that includes inspection expenses, and a technical cooperation fund. The body's regular budget for fiscal 2009 comes to 300 million euros, of which Japan's contribution accounts for 16.5%. In addition, 16% of the IAEA's technological cooperation fund of 85 million dollars comes from Japan.

8) China expresses displeasure to Aso's offering to Yasukuni Shrine

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)
April 24, 2009

Kengo Sakajiri, Beijing

In reaction to Prime Minister Taro's Aso provision of an offering to Yasukuni Shrine, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman released a statement yesterday and indicated: "We expressed our great concern and displeasure to the Japanese side through diplomatic channels." Earlier, on April 21, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu took a constrained view. It is believed that because of unceasing criticism, the Chinese Foreign Ministry decided to lodge its protest.

9) Machimura faction members slam NHK program on Japan's rule over Taiwan as overly anti-Japanese

SANKEI (Page 2) (Abridged slightly)
April 24, 2009

The faction in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) headed by former Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura held its general meeting yesterday. In the session, many members criticized NHK's program titled "The First-Class Country in Asia," aired on April 5 as the first installment of the series called "NHK Special: Japan Debut."

The program looked at Japan's rule over Taiwan [between 1895 and 1945]. House of Representatives member Tomomi Inada criticized it, saying: "In Taiwan, there are many pro-Japan people, such as former President Lee Teng-hui. But the program focused only on anti-Japanese aspects." Machimura, too, followed suit, commenting:

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"I watched the program, and I had many questions about it." Former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe noted: "The weekly magazine Shukan Shincho also mentioned the program, and I feel the program was terrible. I want people to watch this series with interest."

Former Education, Science and Technology Minister Nariaki Nakamura, too, expressed his intention to the press corps to send an open letter to NHK as the head of the parliamentary league that considers Japan's future and history education.

10) Ruling camp managing Diet affairs at its own pace

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)
April 24, 2009

The leadership of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has continued to take a bullish attitude in managing Diet affairs, aiming at an early enactment of the fiscal 2009 supplementary budget and related bills. The move is aimed to appeal its stance of giving priority to the economy to the public, as well as to leave room for an early dissolution of the House of Representatives.

Calling the government's effort for compiling the extra budget for fiscal 2009 worth more than 15 trillion yen "the largest-ever operation," LDP Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Tadamori Oshima has said that the Diet should carry out deliberations even during the Golden Week of holidays. Cabinet ministers have been urged to refrain from overseas trips.

In a meeting yesterday of the Diet affairs committee chiefs of the LDP and the main opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), an agreement was reached as the LDP asserted that Finance Minister Kaoru Yosano should deliver a policy speech on April 27 when the extra budget and related bills are presented; and that interpellation by representatives from each political party should be held on April 28 based on Yosano's policy speech. The DPJ has been facing a headwind due to the indictment of its leader Ichiro Ozawa's first state-funded secretary for violating the Political Funds Control Law over donations from Nishimatsu Construction Co. Therefore, the ruling coalition has seized control of the pace of Diet debate. In a gathering of the LDP Lower House members held last evening in Chiba City, Secretary General Hiroyuki Hosoda stressed: "We are determined to run (the extra budget and related bills) no matter how hard the DPJ opposes."

The LDP leadership's prediction is that if the extra budget and related bills are enacted, the conditions will be satisfied for Prime Minister Taro Aso to dissolve the Lower House. Oshima, an aide to Aso, appears to be motivated to increase options as many as possible for Lower House dissolution until the September expiration of the terms of the Lower House members, including the possibility of dissolution in May, according to a person close to him.

The ruling bloc aims to get the extra budget and related bill through the Lower House on May 8 and enact them by May 15. However, it cannot manage the House of Councillors as it likes, since the DPJ-led opposition camp controls the upper chamber. The ruling camp of the Upper House yesterday called for holding Yosano's speech on the 27th and interpellation by representatives from political parties on the 28th. The opposition, however, refused to hold the interpellation on the 28th. The DPJ caucus in the Upper House intends to propose holding the interpellation on May 7.

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DPJ Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Kenji Yamaoka told reporters yesterday:

"We will not accept the idea that deliberations should be ended because certain amount of time is spent. If the ruling camp defiantly cuts deliberations in the Lower House, we will spend appropriate time for deliberations in the Upper House."

11) DPJ's Maehara: Ozawa might be urged to resign if a change in government impossible

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)
April 24, 2009

Seiji Maehara, former president of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), delivered a speech yesterday in Chigasaki City, Kanagawa Prefecture. Referring in it to the question of whether DPJ President Ichiro Ozawa will resign from his post, He stated:

"President Ozawa will make a decision on his own as to whether to remain in or step down from his post. However, if we determine that it is impossible for our party to bring about a change in government under his leadership, the DPJ will be required to fulfill the capability of self-cleansing. Since there is a time limit, I together with likeminded colleagues will have to consider asking him

to quit his post."

Maehara indicated in his remarks that he and his colleagues as a group would urge Ozawa to resign if the support rate for the DPJ considerably dropped.

12) Government projects minus 3.3% GDP growth in fiscal 2009

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Full)
April 24, 2009

The government decided yesterday to revise its projected real gross domestic product (GDP) growth for fiscal 2009 downward to 3.3% and its nominal growth rate to minus 3%. This is the worst ever level.

The nation's GDP is expected to shrink for the second straight fiscal year. The government will announce the projection on April 27.

The government had set the real growth rate at 0% and the nominal rate at 0.1% in fiscal 2009 as of January, but it had to largely revise these figures downward, reflecting the gloomy economic situation since the latter half of 2008.

The government says that although the real growth rate will shrink by about 5.2% unless it takes special fiscal steps, its additional economic package will serve to bring down the rate to minus 3.3%.

13) Ignoring opposition from Japan, U.S., Europe, China to launch new system that would deal heavy blow to Japanese IT firms

YOMIURI (Page 11) (Full)
April 24, 2009

Despite strong opposition from Japan, the U.S., and Europe, China has decided to launch a system to force foreign manufacturers of

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information technology (IT) products to disclose key information about them. Japanese firms had optimistically thought that China would not introduce what was considered to be an impractical system. If Japan's leading manufacturers are forced to pull out of the Chinese market with its high growth potential, the Japanese economy, which still shows no signs of recovery, will unavoidably receive a serious blow.

Recently, an increasing number of information-technology (IT) products equipped with devices that allow the owner to identify them have been marketed, for example, a system of verification by using a personal identification number (PIN) or identification by the veins on one's palm. Source codes are the base of the information-security software program. Industrialized countries have introduced a mutual-recognition system, under which certification is mutually recognized between importing and exporting countries and regions. Given this, the disclosure of source codes is unnecessary among them. But China's new system will unprecedentedly require foreign companies to disclose their products' source codes.

China reportedly has asked the governments of Japan, the U.S., and European countries to take action in line with international rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO). But it will take more than one year until the procedures complete. Under the current situation, they remain unable to find effective means to have China give up the system.

Observers take the view that China's tough stance may reflect its confidence as the Chinese market is becoming more attractive to many countries amid all industrialized countries' markets shrink due to the global recession.

14) Whale meat more eco-friendly than beef? CO2 emitted during whale meat production less than one tenth of that for beef

SANKEI (Page 2) (Excerpts)
April 24, 2009

The amount of carbon dioxide (CO2) and other greenhouse gases discharged in the production of whale meat is less than one tenth of that for beef production, according to research results by the Fisheries Research Agency (FRA). This shows that a certain aspect of whale meat is more eco-friendly than beef. Spotlighting this data, a Fisheries Agency official commented: "We can use this data as material for seeking anti-whaling countries' understanding in negotiations on the resumption of commercial whaling."

After the contents of the stomach and other parts of whales caught by research whaling ships in the Antarctic Ocean and other seas are fully investigated, their meat is distributed across the nation. The FRA calculated the amounts of CO2 emissions based on the amounts of fuel used by research whaling vessels several years ago.

As a result, the agency estimates that about 2.5 kg of CO2 is discharged in the process of producing 1 kilogram of meat from a whale seized in waters about 1,000 km from Japan. Even in the case of whales caught in the Antarctic Ocean, located more than 10,000 km from Japan, the amount is estimated to be no more than about 3 kg.

Meanwhile, the volume of greenhouse gases discharged in the process of livestock farmers producing 1 kg of beef is calculated to be 36.4 kg, over ten times more than in whale meat production.

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The Fisheries Agency thinks it would be easier to obtain understanding from anti-whaling countries if Japan emphasizes the advantages of whaling in terms of environmental protection. Such data may be used in future international negotiations.

ZUMWALT